

# U.S. Agency for International Development Administrator Andrew S. Natsios

## US Relief Efforts to Tsunami-Affected Countries

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Chairman Kolbe, Ranking Member Lowey, and members of the Committee, thank you for inviting me to testify today about U.S. strategies for relief and reconstruction assistance in response to the recent devastating tsunami. As we speak, one of the largest humanitarian responses in history is proceeding with the full collaboration of staff from the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), the Department of Defense (DOD), the Department of State, and other federal departments and agencies. U.S. Government agencies are also closely working with the governments of tsunami-affected countries, other donor governments, UN agencies, international organizations, and non-governmental organizations (NGOs).

The very day the earthquake hit, USAID mobilized Disaster Assistance Response Teams (DARTs) and USAID Mission staff to respond to humanitarian needs in the affected countries. Approximately 50 DART members and more than 100 USAID Mission staff in Indonesia, India, Sri Lanka, and Thailand are conducting assessments of affected areas, participating in the overall coordination of relief and reconstruction activities, apprising funding requests, and recommending appropriate U.S. Government relief efforts. And we immediately established our 24-hour Response Management Team (RMT) in Washington as a backstop to the field staff and point of contact for information and assistance.

What U.S. and other relief workers confronted was a massive disaster that, in addition to devastating lives, created major obstacles to relief and recovery operations. The severity and geographic scope of the earthquake and resulting tsunamis, particularly in Indonesia, demanded a huge logistical operation. The tsunamis destroyed much of the infrastructure of Aceh that could be used as the backbone of response activities.

Even prior to the disaster, many countries in the region had limited airport and seaport facilities. In one area, we quickly concluded that a lack of trained personnel in the air traffic management system would significantly slow down relief delivery. Australian and American forces that had air traffic control experience were put in place and remedied the situation.

One member of the USAID family experienced the disaster first hand. Bill Foerderer, from USAID/Jakarta, and his family were in Khao Lak, Thailand on Christmas holiday, relaxing after a very eventful year in Indonesia. The morning the disaster hit, they had left their hotel to go kayaking on the bay side of the Phuket peninsula. Shortly after putting in on the water, they were called back to shore by park guards who had been informed of the disaster that had already struck the Andaman coast. They knew something was wrong and tried to go back to their hotel. Scenes of rubble and devastation awaited them - more than 5 kilometers inland. Most of the people in their hotel had died in the Tsunami, and Bill and his family were evacuated to a nearby town, Takuapa. After contacting U.S. Embassy/Bangkok, Bill spent most of the night of the 26th in the Takuapa Hospital, gathering names of Americans who were injured in the disaster. U.S. Embassy Bangkok provided superlative support, taking names of the Americans, but also the names of the many Scandinavian and German children, whom Bill found injured, frightened, and without their parents. Thanks to the U.S. Embassy, critical information was communicated to American and foreign families within hours of the disaster. And thanks to the Consular staff, Bill and his wife Betina received new passports the same day, and returned to their post in Jakarta, Indonesia where they both work on the tremendous USAID team that is delivering relief to Aceh and North Sumatra.

In this environment, the international relief community, including USAID, the U.S. military, and other U.S. Government agencies, displayed remarkable ingenuity. Despite the great size and complexity of the response, flexibility became the rule of the day. A good example of this is the partnership between USAID and two of its partners, the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and Development Alternatives (DAI). Prior to the earthquake, humanitarian organizations were not permitted into Aceh province without express permission by the Government of Indonesia. Despite this restriction, IOM and DAI had managed to retain a strong relationship with provincial officials through a network of local staff in every district. In the immediate aftermath of the disaster, USAID and other donors capitalized on these relationships by providing relief funding to IOM and DAI to immediately move relief commodities into Aceh from Medan on 80 trucks contracted by USAID/Indonesia.

U.S. military assets were critical in overcoming logistical obstacles. The military provided airlifts, helicopters, and sea transport. The civilian relief community, including USAID staff, provided support in prioritizing humanitarian needs and vetting requests for assistance. This alignment of military and civilian capacities, which I will discuss further, was a key aspect of this response and represents a major step forward in how the U.S. Government responds to disasters.

One of the more remarkable examples of cooperation involved a USAID Food for Peace Officer, Herbie Smith, and the USS Abraham Lincoln. The Abraham Lincoln was offshore of Banda Aceh and had capacity to produce tens of thousands of gallons of potable

water. The only problem was that there was no way to get it to people on shore. Herbie quickly went out and bought a huge quantity of water jugs from local markets throughout Indonesia, and arranged with the military to get the jugs transported to the Abraham Lincoln. Military personnel then filled the jugs with clean water, and helicopters distributed the water in Aceh. This is but one example of how USAID's experienced staff, working hand-in-hand with the military, got assistance to needy populations.

With the arrival of additional personnel and operating equipment, many of the logistical challenges were largely overcome. Procedures established by USAID's DART and Mission staff and U.S. military personnel helped ensure effective delivery of goods and the accurate tracking of cargo. I am able to report that the distribution of relief assistance in Indonesia has now progressed from emergency airdrops of relief supplies via helicopter into an orderly distribution process in most of the affected areas. Despite congestion, bad weather, and security concerns, the U.N. World Food Program, with U.S. and other donor contributions, is providing food to approximately 330,000 beneficiaries in that country. Helicopter drops continue only in isolated areas and efforts are underway to increase access to these regions.

USAID's effort in South Asia vindicates the significant procedural and policy changes that govern how the Agency responds to overseas disasters. We have both revamped our organizational approach and accelerated the time perspective under which we conduct relief work operations. These changes have been in the works for the last several years. They are based largely on our experiences with Hurricane Mitch, as well as applying the lessons we learned in Mozambique, Afghanistan, and Iraq.

Until recently, a compartmentalized approach was used in responding to disasters overseas. USAID's Office of Food for Peace (FFP) would handle emergency food needs, while USAID's Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance (OFDA) would respond to immediate non-food necessities. If the disaster struck in a "country in transition," USAID's Office of Transition Initiatives (OTI) would respond with appropriate self-sustaining initiatives. After immediate life-saving assistance was provided, USAID's respective regional bureau would step in to work on reconstruction and rehabilitation. This approach was very segmented, both chronologically and organizationally. This meant lost opportunities in the use of relief activities that could accelerate reconstruction, encourage community participation, and build a foundation for development. In contrast to the past, USAID now takes a more holistic approach organizationally and a longer term view operationally.

In responding to disasters, USAID has made organizational changes that allow it to draw immediately from particular expertise found throughout the Agency and in the rest of the U.S. Government. In the Tsunami relief effort, USAID's DART and RMT included staff not only from OFDA, but also from several other USAID offices and bureaus, including FFP, OTI, the Office of Democracy and Governance, the Bureau for Global Health, the Bureau for Asia and the Near East and its USAID Missions in the affected area, and the Bureau for Legislative and Public Affairs. Staff from USAID Missions in Jakarta, Colombo, New Delhi, and Bangkok (and it is important to note the value of having a U.S. foreign assistance presence in the region before, during, and after such a crisis) were embedded into the DART structure from the beginning. We have also pulled staff for the DART and RMT from other federal agencies, such as DOD, the Department of the Interior, the Department of Health and Human Services, including the Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry, the Department of Agriculture, including the U.S. Forest Service, and the Bureau for Land Management. The DART and RMT also utilized staff from outside the federal government, including the Fairfax and Los Angeles Search and Rescue teams, the University of Texas, and the Center of Excellence in Disaster Management and Humanitarian Assistance.

USAID has drawn upon its long experience in humanitarian relief to establish the relationships and agreements necessary to quickly deploy all available assets when a disaster strikes. The Agency worked in partnership with the global civilian humanitarian relief community - NGOs and international organizations. Bringing together their experience, technical skills, and resources adds tremendous value to our response efforts. In the Tsunami disaster, you have seen the fruits of that labor. Effective coordination is the key component of the new model for USAID operations. To effectively spearhead the U.S. Government's disaster response, our activities can no longer be stove-piped into different offices and bureaus within the Agency.

In disasters of this magnitude, it is also absolutely essential to coordinate civilian response activities with those of the U.S. military. Let me take this opportunity to personally thank the President and the military for rapidly committing considerable assets to the region. Without their strong support, especially with regard to transportation and the staff and equipment they made available, our response would not have been as effective as it was.

Cooperation between USAID and the Department of Defense has expanded dramatically over the last several years in response to natural disasters and critical military operations. Key to this cooperation has been the creation of effective coordination mechanisms, from the tactical field level all the way up to the strategic headquarters level. Standard operating procedures and close cooperation between USAID and the military has been solid from the top to the bottom of the chain of command, with USAID staff engaged at critical points at which decisions are made. What we have witnessed over the past several weeks is substantial progress toward the seamless cooperation of both organizations in natural disaster response, which is the result of hard work long before the earthquake and tsunamis hit. The efforts of both DOD and USAID to build relationships that bring the capabilities and expertise of each into an effective partnership have proven their worth in this disaster, and we will continue this approach of active engagement and planning with DOD.

Let me explain how the relationship is working in the field today by citing what took place in Thailand. In Thailand's humanitarian assistance hub, the DART established a Military Liaison Cell, which validates and prioritizes requests for assistance. This helps ensure that U.S. military resources are used in the most effective and efficient manner, based on humanitarian principles as opposed to first come, first served. Liaison officers from the affected countries' militaries, as well as from militaries of other donor nations, also participated in the coordination process. The military's willingness to accept USAID guidance on the best use of their assets to support local governments and NGOs in responding to humanitarian needs was a milestone in our relationship. For that I am again very grateful.

I am also convinced that this coordination was key to saving lives, feeding people, and relieving untold suffering. USAID has also placed staff at the Pacific Command Headquarters in Hawaii, where much of the planning for the relief effort originated under Admiral Tom Fargo's leadership. As we move from relief to reconstruction, USAID and DOD are already working to ensure a seamless and smooth transition from reliance on military assets to those of civilian agencies. Towards this end, USAID's Deputy Assistant Administrator for Asia and the Near East just returned from a trip with Deputy Secretary Wolfowitz to the region where they discussed concrete steps to ensure that civilian agencies are in position to assume roles and support now provided by the US military.

USAID's policy of consolidating and coordinating relief efforts within the Agency and across the U.S. government is only part of our new approach. Another is our focus on incorporating development objectives for economic and societal change into relief efforts from the very beginning of a response. Our policy is to plan and carry out relief, rehabilitation, and reconstruction simultaneously.

More than two decades ago the late, legendary disaster expert Fred Cuny published a groundbreaking book, *Disasters and Development*. In it he laid out his experience of years of working with the victims of natural disasters the world round. His vision was revolutionary, yet breathtakingly simple. In a nutshell: the talent and resilience of people struck by disaster are the most powerful forces for rehabilitation and reconstruction in disaster relief. The people in their communities are the first responders in any disaster. In fact, they represent forces so powerful that they can - and must - be harnessed to build positive change in the affected society.

Natural disasters - earthquakes, volcanoes, hurricanes, tsunamis - hurt people and cripple economies. They kill; they maim; and they destroy. But victims are never helpless. These people know their environment. They know their society. They are very likely to have coped with other disasters in their history. They, more than anyone, want to recover. And, as the shock of the disaster subsides, new opportunities emerge to build a more sustainable, more equitable, and, in many cases, a less violent society. Disaster survivors are often among the strongest voices for social change.

External assistance must capitalize on these opportunities. Of course, immediate physical needs have to be met: clean water and sanitation, health care, food, and shelter. But the best way for outsiders to assist is to provide help that is part of a long-term solution, rather than just a hand-out. In practice, this means that relief assistance efforts should, from the very beginning, focus on recovery and renewal. While providing life-saving assistance, we need to help revive the local economy, which will ultimately be the engine to drive a return to normalcy.

Relief assistance should help local government and civil authorities get back on their feet by empowering their response to the disaster. To meet relief needs, interventions should re-start social services at the local level - schools, primary health care clinics, water treatment facilities, and so on. It should, early on, assist stricken families with the help they need to restore destroyed housing and ruined livelihoods. Again, the assistance effort should focus on development even as it provides short-term relief.

Fred was killed in Chechnya in 1995, almost ten years ago. Yet the Indian Ocean tsunami shows that his vision is as relevant as ever. Not only does his approach make for more effective responses, it simultaneously opens prospects for social change. We must work to see that something good can emerge out of destruction.

This approach to relief and development assistance forms the cornerstone of USAID's programming strategy. It emanates through USAID's nine "Principles of Development and Reconstruction Assistance" (attached). For example, the Principle of Ownership states that the affected people themselves own their relief and recovery process. The Principle of Capacity-Building requires that USAID interventions strengthen local institutions. The Principle of Sustainability says that program impact must endure after assistance ends.

By integrating traditional relief activities with measures to strengthen self-sufficiency and productivity, relief can ensure survival while also building a foundation for future development. USAID's doctrine on linking relief and development is composed of the following:

- Affected countries have the primary responsibility for their transition from relief to recovery and development.
- International partners have the responsibility to ensure the positive impact of their programs through effective operational and strategic coordination.
- Relief programs shall reinforce development objectives.
- Programs shall be designed to help prevent future disaster, natural and man-made, or to mitigate their effects so that the development progress of countries is not undermined.

The nine principles and the simultaneous provision of relief, rehabilitation and reconstruction guide all USAID activities, and our response to the earthquake and tsunamis is no exception. Even while USAID was taking immediate life-saving action, we were also addressing the longer-term needs of the affected population through immediate rehabilitation interventions, including short-term employment projects and activities to strengthen local communities.

The reconstruction phase overall will focus on four core themes:

- One, providing assistance to affected governments with immediate survey and planning work to help them make the best decisions about utilizing the considerable contributions from the world community.
- Two, assistance with several high visibility transportation and public utilities projects, including roads, bridges, water treatment plants, that will serve as "signature" U.S. Government interventions.
- Three, immediate restoration of economic livelihoods, such as small loans, fisheries restoration and cash-for-work programs, that will pump much needed money directly into the hardest hit communities, to allow the victims to take control of their own lives and start rebuilding their businesses.
- And four, building the capacity within the affected governments to prepare for and respond to future disasters. This would

include both U.S. support for a regional tsunami early warning system and a broad range of projects within Indonesia, Sri Lanka and India to build national, provincial and local government capacity to respond to natural disasters.

With additional resources, USAID will also expand the geographic scope of ongoing development programs. We will strengthen local capacity to plan and rebuild community level infrastructure, strengthen and expand formal and non-formal training to improve basic education and job skills, and improve democratic governance and accountability, especially of local governments as they reestablish and improve basic services in the tsunami-affected areas. Because of the ongoing conflicts in both countries, our development portfolios were limited in much of the area affected by the tsunami; the host countries' openness to international agencies and relief have opened the door for broader reconstruction and development assistance. In both Indonesia and Sri Lanka, we will expand ongoing partnerships with U.S. and local NGOs to rebuild homes, schools and clinics; to identify and train teachers and additional primary health care workers, and to provide credit and technical assistance to create jobs and income opportunities. While reports suggest that those internally displaced are already beginning to return to their communities, we will obviously continue to provide assistance along with the World Food Program and other international agencies to IDPs in camps.

Most of these initiatives will be managed from our country-based Missions. Our new regional office in Bangkok, Thailand will provide overall procurement support for the region and manage any regional efforts, such as the early warning response.

While meeting physical relief and reconstruction needs, we must also remember to address people's psychological well-being. Programs focused on assisting survivors to lower their levels of distress, return to a sense of normalcy and stability, and resume their roles in the family and community are an important part of USAID's approach. Family connection is a cornerstone of psychological well-being. USAID is therefore supporting programs that trace unaccompanied children and unite them with extended family members. We are also funding initiatives that provide structured opportunities for children to promote a sense of security and stability. Such programs have the added benefit of supervising children while adult family members engage in rebuilding efforts or income-generating activities.

We are also stepping up our education and public awareness efforts to create greater understanding and heighten attention to the added risk vulnerable women and children face to falling victims to traffickers. When people are displaced, when children are separated from their families, when livelihoods are ruined, and when infrastructure is destroyed, people become more vulnerable to labor and sex trafficking crimes. While so far there is no evidence to suggest that trafficking has increased, we are redoubling our efforts to educate women and children and relief workers to the increased risk, and to help government organizations in affected countries to address issues of protection and abuse among those affected by the tsunami. In Sri Lanka, for example, USAID has funded UNICEF and Save the Children/UK to establish a registry of orphans and funded the Solidarity Center to provide training and strengthen government and civil society collaboration to protect children. In Indonesia, similar awareness and education activities will begin in the IDP camps and for relief workers who come in contact with these populations.

As USAID continues to make major improvements in its approach and operations, we have not forgotten one of our fundamental obligations - ensuring the proper and effective use of U.S. Government funding. USAID takes its responsibility as steward of taxpayer money very seriously. For this purpose, USAID/DART members and Mission staff meet regularly with host governments and contractors and grantees to ensure that all USAID-funded activities are well coordinated and complement other programs on the ground. USAID staff members make regular field visits to observe the progress of USAID-funded programs. Our missions are also working with civil society organizations in the countries, such as the Forum on Aceh Recovery, to assist efforts of local organizations to track and monitor relief and recovery budgets. USAID will deploy new USAID Emergency Disaster Response Coordinators to work in close collaboration with the Mission and implementing partners to ensure the efficient and responsible implementation of programs that have been established in the early days of the response. From the inception of our response, the Inspector General's Office has been involved in the planning of our relief, rehabilitation, and reconstruction programs to ensure high levels of accountability for public funds. Through their regional office in Manila, the Inspector General will monitor the relief and reconstruction effort.

Of course, neither USAID, nor the entire U.S. Government for that matter, is alone in the outpouring of assistance from our generous nation. The American people, in the form of individuals, civic associations, churches, and corporations, are giving stunning amounts through NGOs. The President, and former Presidents Bill Clinton and George Bush, have asked people to reach deep into their pockets to help those affected by this disaster. And the response has been overwhelming. Americans have donated more than \$520 million to humanitarian agencies - a total amount second only to 9/11. USAID is actively working with large corporate partners to build public-private alliances in support of medium to long-term reconstruction efforts in the region. For example, USAID has already initiated a partnership with Mars, Incorporated, which has generously committed \$1 million to assist vulnerable children in the affected area. I would like to thank this President, and the two former Presidents as well, for helping to mobilize this remarkable display of public support. And I would like to thank the American people - for showing the world once again what a compassionate people we truly are.

The compassion of Americans is at the very core of what USAID stands for. By giving the citizens of emerging nations a helping hand as they work to improve their societies and economies, we show the world the best of the United States. As the President said, "Well after the immediate danger passes, USAID is still going to be in the hard-hit areas....helping the people improve their schools and develop health services and mitigate conflict and reinvigorate local economies, and help build institutions of democracy, so people can live in peace and freedom."

The policy changes that I have described here today, the results of which you have seen in the remarkable relief efforts underway in South Asia, are all part of living up to the trust that the American people have placed in us. The world is a complex place, and interventions have to be designed accordingly. We have to stay flexible, keep our eye on the long-term objectives, and work together. This is the only way forward. And this is the new USAID.

Thank you.